

deal, while people and families in Oregon and across the nation continue to wait for a meaningful economic stimulus package.

The State of Oregon continues to lead the nation in unemployment, so it is frustrating to see Republican proposals that continue to focus on people who need the Federal Government's help the least. Even more exasperating is the fact that these corporate tax credits and tax cuts will be paid by Social Security and Medicare surpluses.

A true economic stimulus package would directly put people back to work and not last longer than necessary. The bill before us today is not an economic stimulus package, is not temporary, and does not target relief to businesses hurt by the recession.

The most significant and appropriate response to help the American people would be accomplished by increasing funding for ready-to-go public works projects that will reduce unemployment, while benefiting communities across the country. Every state in the nation has transportation, water, environmental clean-up, and other infrastructure projects that could immediately employ people to make our communities safer and healthier.

This bill is the third attempt by the Republican leadership to use a weakened economy as an excuse for permanent tax breaks for their favored few. Until a fair and sensible economic stimulus package is presented to the House, I must withhold my support.

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H.R. 622, the Economic Support and Worker Assistance Act.

The Republican Majority's actions on the economic stimulus package are making me feel like Bill Murray in the movie, *Groundhog Day*. Just as Bill Murray had the same bad day over and over again, we keep getting the same bad bill over and over again. Unfortunately, for the millions of Americans who are unemployed, this is not a movie, but real life—and it is turning out to be a tragedy, rather than a comedy.

The Senate passed legislation to extend unemployment benefits by 13 weeks for the more than 1 million people who lost their jobs in recent months. We should be approving that same legislation so it can be sent to the President for his signature today. We are about to go into recess for nearly 2 weeks. If we do not send a bill to the President today, we will take no action for a minimum of 12 days—and during that time, more than 120,000 people will lose their benefits.

Passage of a clean bill to extend unemployment benefits would give unemployed Americans and their families some immediate financial relief. Such action is supported by wide, bipartisan majorities in Congress, so there is no excuse for delay. Unfortunately, the House Republican leadership refuses to do what is right to protect America's workers. Instead, they insist on continually giving bigger and more outrageous tax cuts to their corporate friends, while millions of unemployed Americans are desperately trying to feed their families and search for new jobs.

I urge my colleagues to vote for a 13-week extension of unemployment insurance benefits and to vote against tax breaks for big business and the wealthy. By doing otherwise on Valentine's Day, we will do more than break the hearts of the American people, we will break their banks.

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, on February 6 the Senate passed a 13-week extension of

unemployment insurance by unanimous consent. Fifty Democratic, 49 Republican and one Independent Senator recognized that while our country is at war and our economy is in a downturn it is time to lend a hand to individuals who are out of work. After weeks of attempting to pass a comprehensive stimulus the Senate came together and acknowledged that political differences should not prevent the government from helping America's most needy at this critical time.

Unfortunately, the bill before the House today fails to follow the bipartisan spirit of the Senate and instead subjects people who will soon be without jobs and without unemployment insurance to a Washington political game. People out of work around the country deserve better treatment by Congress. The victims of today's House action are hard-working Americans out of work through no fault of their own. In my own City of New York recovery from the terrorist attack has made the unemployment situation particularly grim. I continually encounter people who are victims of economic circumstance like the woman who approached me last Friday on Lexington Ave and urged me as a Member of the House to follow the Senate's lead. This House should know that our constituents are watching and they can clearly see that unemployment insurance is falling victim to a political agenda.

Finally, the Majority bill was crafted in the middle of the night last night and represents such an amalgamation of provisions that we do not even know how much it will cost. The President's budget proposal recognizes that we are not eating into the Social Security surplus. I do not disagree with every provision in the bill but it is irresponsible to vote on a substantial tax package like this without knowing all of its long-term ramifications.

Mr. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, yet again, we are involved in a most curious proceeding. The Republican majority is bringing forth, for a third time, an economic stimulus bill that cannot be passed in the Senate and is being brought up only for partisan reasons. Many of my colleagues in the Republican leadership talk about the obstructionism in the Senate. I say this exercise is the height of obstructionism. The House Republican leadership seems intent on doing things "my way or the highway." And each time they pass the same old bill, they keep millions of unemployed Americans from getting the help they need. In fact, by their delay, more than 11,000 workers each day exhaust their unemployment benefits and therefore would immediately benefit from the Senate's unemployment extension.

But the Republican leadership will not allow a vote on any other bill than their own. We can't even vote for the stimulus amendment on unemployment assistance that passed the Senate by voice vote. That is neither bipartisan nor responsible. In fact, at no time have my Republican colleagues reached out to me or other Democrats to work on an economic stimulus bill. At the one and only meeting we had on the stimulus health pieces in which the Republican leadership allowed Members to show up, we were told that they had to "just say no" to anything we had to discuss. That too is neither bipartisan nor responsible.

So, here I am again, for the third time, telling you why this is a bad bill. The Republican leadership bill is supposed to provide immediate stimulus. So why do many of the tax provisions cost billions after 2002, in years when

the economy is expected to be in recovery and stimulus is no longer needed? And why does this bill provide no meaningful immediate help for the millions of Americans without work and without health insurance coverage?

For example, why can't we truly help laid-off workers continue COBRA coverage? The Republicans promise assistance for workers to continue coverage under COBRA. But, the 60 percent tax credit is inadequate to allow families to afford coverage; millions of workers would not even be eligible because of restrictive definitions; and the Republican leadership program sets the stage for complete gutting of the employer-sponsored insurance—something Republicans have long tried to do. This tax credit is even more meaningless for workers who don't qualify for COBRA, as they tend to be working in lower paying jobs and would find it even more difficult to afford coverage, particularly in the individual market where in most instances there are no protections on cost or availability of coverage.

Also, why can't we help laid-off workers who are not eligible for COBRA coverage? Presented with an option of building on a program, Medicaid, that already provides guaranteed, affordable health insurance coverage for nearly 44 million Americans and a program that currently does not provide health insurance to anyone, Republicans chose the program that has no experience providing coverage. Worse yet, they don't even guarantee any of the money would be used for health care. And, in attempt to counter some of our arguments, they provide funding to state high-risk pools, presumably to give people a place to spend their "meaningless" tax credits. Unfortunately, they are a day late and a dollar short: \$40 million won't even cover 50% of these pools' costs for the two years it is available.

Had we had a chance to offer a substitute, the Democrats would have offered something that truly helps laid-off workers. The Democratic proposal would reach 5.1 million Americans. The Democratic proposal would provide additional financial assistance to states to help them meet the increases in Medicaid enrollment as a result of the economic downturn. As millions join the ranks of the uninsured, we need to ensure states preserve, not limit, eligibility for coverage.

The Democratic proposal would shore up health care providers as well. Providers are being hard hit by the economic downturn. The Democratic proposal would prevent physicians from taking a 5.4 percent reduction in their Medicare payments this coming year. It also includes bipartisan legislation to reduce regulatory obstacles in the Medicare program for providers. Both of these proposals should make it easier for providers to weather the economic downturn and continue providing quality care to seniors.

But the Republican leadership has barred votes on any alternative proposals today. What are they afraid of? We want to put choices before the American public—they do not. We want to help displaced workers and shore up the health system to weather the economic downturn—they do not. We want to provide targeted, responsible stimulus—they do not.

This Republican process is an outrage, serving only to obstruct help for unemployed Americans.